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# CREATION AS THEODICY: IN DEFENSE OF A KABBALISTIC APPROACH TO EVIL

Robert Oakes

The doctrine of *Tzimzum* (or divine “withdrawal”) occupies pride of place in the Jewish mystical tradition as a response to what is arguably the chief theological or metaphysical *concern* of that tradition: namely, how God’s Infinity or Absolute Unlimitedness does not preclude the existence of a distinct domain of finite being. Alternatively, how can it be that God, by virtue of His Maximal Plenteousness, does not exhaust the whole of Reality? I attempt to show that, while a plausible argument — one that does *not* involve the idea of *Tzimzum* — can be mounted against this “pantheism” problem, the doctrine of *Tzimzum* has considerable force as the nucleus of a theodicy.

In this essay I shall present in some expository depth, and reflect philosophically upon, an audacious and beguiling theory concerning *what God Must do in order to Create* which has long enjoyed considerable esteem and influence in the Jewish esoteric or mystical tradition (“Kabbalah”). Indeed, it is a theory that has occupied nothing less than center-stage within the intricate “theosophical” scheme of the great sixteenth-century Kabbalist Rabbi Issac Luria. The thesis I hope to secure is that the doctrine in question displays some very impressive—if as yet philosophically unheralded—strength as the nucleus of a theodicy.

It would be well to clarify, however, that it is not my intention to engage in theodicy here in the strong or classical sense. While it seems to me that the explanation of evil<sup>1</sup> afforded by the Lurianic doctrine in question has the serious prospect of hitting the nail on the head, i.e., of being *the actual reason* for the existence of evil, no attempt will be made in the sequel to vindicate quite that bold a claim. It should not be inferred from this, however, that my purpose is simply to secure one more “defense” for evil (in Plantinga’s sense); i.e., one more “explanation” designed to refute the time-honored but by now fairly disreputable notion that the existence of God is conceptually incompatible with the existence of evil—or at least with all of the evil that actually exists. Hence, the thesis that I shall defend is a bit more fleshy than the claim that the explanation of evil to be elaborated is one for which there is *conceptual* space within the metaphysics of theism. Rather, I shall contend that the relevant Lurianic theory can properly be held to constitute the core of a *plausible* (or *respectable*) explanation of evil. As will be discussed later on in some detail, my central justification for maintaining this is that the theodicy rooted in Rabbi Luria’s doctrine— notwithstanding an



ostensibly problematic aspect of it (to be spelled out at the tail end of these deliberations)—possesses explanatory virtues that are not readily found in more standard (or less “mystical”) theodicies. First, however, some important background concerning the impetus for, and nature of, the Lurianic “theosophical” doctrine in question.

## II

To begin with, Rabbi Luria’s account does not seem to have been designed primarily with theodicy in mind. Rather, it was fundamentally intended as a response to what is arguably the chief metaphysical or theological concern of the Jewish mystical tradition<sup>2</sup>—a concern which can suitably be expressed by the following question(s): how is it that God, as the Being or Substance Who is necessarily limitless in all respects, manages to create a domain of contingent being (the natural universe or cosmos) which is—in some entirely proper sense—metaphysically distinct from Him? Alternatively, since God’s absolute unlimitedness cannot but ensure that He is infinitely plenteous, how can there possibly exist finite or created objects which do not ultimately reduce to mere aspects of Him? How can there be *metaphysical room*<sup>3</sup> a domain of existents distinct from God’s limitless Being? Alternatively, could it seriously be denied that the Divine Substance must be ontologically exhaustive? Rather, does not consistency demand, as would come to be held by Spinoza and Spinozists, that God must be *all-inclusive*, and, accordingly, that every constituent or element of the domain of “Nature” must ultimately reduce to a mere aspect or (following Spinoza) mode of God; i.e. reduce to one of the ways that God is? In sum, while it is central to classical theism (hence to classical Judaism) that the conception of God as absolutely limitless does not metaphysically eventuate in Spinozistic pantheism, how can classical theists *justifiably* deny that God does not exhaust the whole of Reality?<sup>4</sup>

Intriguingly, it has been central to canonical theism that God, while clearly transcending the natural order that He creates and sustains, is nonetheless *immanent* in His Creation. Indeed, the tradition has standardly maintained that God is *pervasively* immanent (omnipresent) in the spatiotemporal order. This notwithstanding, however, traditional theism has resolutely insisted that pervasive immanence does not entail (what might aptly be called) *exhaustive* immanence; i.e. God’s being such that “there is no place empty of Him”<sup>5</sup> is not to be taken to imply that God incorporates all of the being that there is. To sharpen further the notion of exhaustive immanence, consider the difference between the aesthetic creations of a painter and those of a dancer.<sup>6</sup> To begin with, while the painter can go off and leave her work behind, the dancer clearly cannot. Rather, the aesthetic product which constitutes the dance-performance could not conceivably exhibit temporal extension without being conserved through the applicable time-span by the relevant dancer. In just this respect, then, the relation between God and the cosmos shares an important feature with the relation that obtains between the dancer and the dance. For it is central to normative theism that the

cosmos could not conceivably exhibit temporal extension minus the exercise of God's conserving power.

This parallel between God-and-cosmos and dancer-and-dance, however, is quickly overshadowed by a central dissimilarity. For God's pervasive immanence in the cosmos (on, of course, the canonical account) is not nearly as radical as the immanence of the dancer in the dance. That is, unlike the case of the painter and the painting, the dance enjoys no real or metaphysical *distinctness* from the dancer; rather, the dance just is—is fully constituted by—the (aesthetically stylized) motion of the dancer.

Alternatively, the dancer-in-appropriate-motion *exhausts* the dance-performance; the dance simply reduces to—is nothing more than—the dancer-in-appropriate-motion. Accordingly, the issue which the Lurianic theory concerning Divine Creation was designed to resolve can with propriety be rendered as follows: while traditional theists unequivocally reject the notion that the exhaustive immanence of the dancer in the dance constitutes an accurate model of God's immanence in the world, how—in light of its conception of God as absolutely limitless—are they rationally *entitled* to that rejection? How could spinoza and friends possibly be wrong in holding that, by virtue of God's Infinity, the Divine Substance and its modes "form the sum total of existence?"<sup>77</sup>

### III

Rabbi Luria's bold and mythically powerful attempt to overcome this putative difficulty relies heavily upon the concept of *Tzimizum*, which can properly be translated as "withdrawal" or "retreat." The basic idea is this: in order to make "metaphysical room" for the existence of the world, God brings about (as it were) a "self-contraction:" a constriction of the infinite plenteousness of His Being to the extent that would allow for His creation (or, as R. Luria would seem to prefer, Emanation) of a natural universe, which, while radically dependent upon God for its continuity, enjoys (as opposed to the case of the dance and the dancer) some measure of "separateness" from God. Engaging for the moment in a bit of naive or anthropocentric picture-thinking, imagine God "inhaling deeply" or "sucking in His chest" and just holding it there in order to allow for His Creation of a distinct domain of contingent being.

How should we assess this theory? To begin with, it is apparent that the doctrine of *Tzimizum* cannot be taken in a straightforwardly metaphysical or literal sense. Moreover, it seems evident that it was never *intended* to be taken in that way. As stated by Rabbi Schneur Zalman, one of the giants of Jewish mysticism (whom we will have occasion to revisit): "...it is totally impossible to take the doctrine of the constriction literally..."<sup>78</sup> It is, of course, easy to see why. As the sages of the tradition well understood (without, of course, expressing the point in the vocabulary of contemporary modal logic), no individual could have the "power" to divest itself of any property which it possesses essentially. Alternatively, properties possessed essentially are possessed immutably. Hence, since omnipotence clearly does not include the possession of

conceptually impossible powers, God does not possess the "power" to divest Himself of (or in any way modify) His limitlessness or infinite plenteousness. Thus, the Lurianic doctrine of *Tzimzum*—when literally interpreted—cannot possibly constitute a true account of how an absolutely unlimited Being could fail to be ontologically exhaustive.

#### IV

Before moving center-stage into an elaboration of the deeper interpretation of *Tzimzum* and its intriguing relevance to theodicy, I want to take just a brief interlude to suggest that there is a straightforwardly philosophical (or *Tzimzum*—independent) resolution to this time-honored and—or so it seems to me—overstated "pantheism" problem. Specifically, I think it can be shown that there is strong analogical justification for holding that an unlimited Being need not be regarded as ontologically exhaustive. Consider: it is axiomatic that God could not fail to possess maximal or unlimited power; i.e., that God possesses all of the power that could possibly be possessed by a single individual. (Spelling out the entailments of this in some rigorous fashion remains, of course, a matter of controversy.) However, this has never been seriously taken to imply—even by those who embrace (some version of) occasionalism<sup>10</sup>—that God exhausts every last bit of power there can be. To the contrary, however omnipotence is to be unpacked, it has long been recognized to include the power to delegate suitable power to creatures. Precisely the same principle obtains, of course, regarding maximal knowledge (omniscience). To be omniscient is to have all of the knowledge that a single individual could possibly possess: it does not mean (or imply) that God's knowledge must exhaust all of the knowledge there can be. If that were the case, all finite persons—as beings putatively distinct from God—would be saddled with total ignorance. Clearly, this would be a patently absurd construal of Divine Omniscience.

Now it seems to me that the foregoing observations provide us with more than ample justification for rejecting the Spinozist conviction (or "intuition") that God's maximal or unlimited plenteousness entails His exhaustion of all *being*; i.e., that God is ultimately (in the "final analysis") the only Existent.<sup>12</sup> For since, as just discussed, it is perfectly proper to deny that God's maximal power and maximal knowledge entail that He has a monopoly on power and knowledge, why is it not perfectly proper to deny that God's maximal or unlimited *plenteousness* has the (pantheistic) implication that God has a monopoly on *being*? Rather, that God is maximally plenteous can properly be taken to mean that the Substance Who is God possesses the highest degree of plenteousness or being<sup>13</sup> that could possibly be possessed by a single individual; nothing else could possibly approximate (let alone match) the plenteousness enjoyed by God. But that, of course, hardly implies that God relates to the cosmos as the dancer relates to the dance; i.e., that (in the "final analysis") nothing is metaphysically distinct from the maximally plenteous Substance Who is God. Accordingly, it seems entirely in order to conclude that classical or Spinozistic pantheism is not an entailment of God's unlimited or infinite

plenteousness. Of course, since analogical reasoning is structurally non-probative or or nondefinitive, the foregoing argument fails to *guarantee* the truth of its conclusion. This notwithstanding, however, it can still constitute (as I believe it does) *strong warrant* for holding that contingent or created objects are metaphysically distinct from the maximally plenteous Being Who created and sustains them. Moreover, there is much to suggest that the nonprobative character of our argument is not *simply* a function of its analogical structure; i.e., it may also have much to do with the inherently philosophical (or metaphysical) nature of its conclusion. For it may well be that there are no arguments with philosophically interesting conclusions (as, to take the present case, *Maximal plenteousness does not entail ontological exhaustiveness*)—be they even deductively rigorous and sound—which are probative or definitive in the sense that anyone who accepted the premisses of such an argument but rejected its conclusion would be irrational or intellectually perverse.<sup>14</sup> If so, then, since our argument both has a philosophically interesting conclusion *and* is analogical in structure, that it is nonprobative may well be “overdetermined.” However, none of this vitiates an assessment of the argument as constituting an eminently *plausible* case for its conclusion; i.e., as providing a strong analogical foundation for holding that God’s maximal plenteousness does not require His exhaustion of reality.

## V

Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad Chasidism,<sup>15</sup> suggests an intriguing analogy as a clue to interpreting the real meaning of the doctrine of *Tzimzum*. The construal in question in no way implies—in contradistinction to the *literalist* understanding of the doctrine—the impossible: namely, that God’s infinite plenitude can in some way be lessened or diminished. Rabbi Zalman asks us to consider the case of a teacher who needs to present some rather complex or difficult idea to her students. Since the class could not begin to grasp the relevant idea at the teacher’s plane of comprehension, she needs to “reduce” the concept to a level at which it *can* be properly grasped by her students without sacrificing any of its core content. (The sort of daunting challenge with which teachers are regularly faced.) Alternatively, the students would clearly be intellectually overwhelmed if the idea were to be presented at something like conceptual full-throttle. Hence, the teacher needs to “descend” (as it were) to the comprehension-level of the students. While she *reveals* for the benefit of her students, she also needs to *conceal* for their benefit: alternatively, in order to convey the concept effectively, some intellectual braking—some *tzimzum*—is required.

According to Rabbi zalman, this analogy provides us with the requisite conceptual foothold for grasping the real or deep significance of the Divine *Tzimzum* undertaken by God. vis-a-vis His Creation: namely, God’s concealing or severely restraining the full intensity of His infinite or unlimited Radiance. Such Divine restraint is required to ensure that the finite or limited beings produced by God are able to subsist or survive as such. That is, if God were to reveal the full intensity of His limit-

less Radiance, finite being— hence human persons—could not but be *nullified* or *consumed* by that Radiance.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, no finite existent could possibly survive intact—could possibly withstand or endure— a full-intensity revelation of God's Spiritual Power. Intriguingly, and as readily confirmed, there is serious Scriptural support for this idea. In Exodus 33:18, Moses makes the following request of God: "Show me now Your glory." Here is how God (in part) responds: "You will not be able to see My face, for man shall not see Me and live" (Exodus: 33:20). Then, just a bit further on (Exodus: 22-23), God states:

"...While my glory passeth by.. I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand until I have passed by. And I will take away My hand, and thou shalt see my back; but My face may not be seen."

Hence, there is just so much of the Divine Holiness that human persons have the capacity to sustain. Anything stronger than this would ensure their annihilation or nullification as individuals metaphysically distinct from God.

This theme surfaces often in many central Jewish sources and among many seminal Jewish thinkers. As observed by the great medieval philosopher and Biblical exegete Levi Ben Gerson (Gersonides) in his commentary on Deut. 4:33 ("Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?"):

A human being could not live after experiencing a degree of revelation that was far above his spiritual capacity [much as a person can be blinded by a sudden flash of light]. Even Jacob thought himself fortunate to survive an encounter with an angel—yet the entire nation of Israel heard the voice of God and remained alive.<sup>17</sup>

Nonetheless, as noted by the distinguished (late) Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan:

... the first reaction at Sinai was one of shock. The people could not endure the majesty of God's word, and our sages teach us that their souls literally left them. Their reaction is expressed in the Biblical account of Sinai where immediately afterward they told Moses (Ex.20:16), "You speak to us and we will listen, but let not God speak with us any more, for we will die."<sup>18</sup>

Moses' remarkable level of holiness ensured that he was uniquely suited to receive God's word. This notwithstanding, and as noted just above, even he—as a finite being—could not have absorbed God's full or complete Glory: ("...My face may not be seen").

Accordingly, the Jewish mystical tradition has insisted that some "veiling" of the Divine Countenance—some "hiding of the face" (as it were), i.e., *Hester Panim*—is required so that the Divine Light "... shall not manifest itself in a greater radiance than the lower worlds are capable of receiving."<sup>19</sup> Here, then, we have the proper or authoritative interpretation of

the doctrine of *Tzimzum*. Just as sunscreen on exposed skin is needed to protect us from what would be the harmful effects—at a certain level of intensity—of the rays of the sun, one can properly (albeit metaphorically) view the Divine *Tzimzum* as God's "protective sunscreen." As admirably encapsulated by the contemporary expositor and representative of the mystical tradition Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, "The basic idea is that the infinite light cannot reveal itself as it is in [or to] the finite, for the finite could not possibly contain it."<sup>20</sup>

## VI

The question of moment, then, is surely the following: what does all of this have to do with *theodicy*? Alternatively, what connection is there between the doctrine of *Tzimzum* (properly interpreted) and the existence of evil or unmerited suffering? Well, the notion that I shall go on to defend is this: the Divine *Tzimzum* requisite for Divine Creation comes at a serious metaphysical price; namely, an unavoidable by-product of the "veiling" of the Divine Countenance (Radiance, Holiness) to the extent required for finite being to survive intact—for it not to be absorbed or consumed by the Infinite—is a serious potential for unmerited suffering. For the revelatory depth of Divine Radiance or Holiness necessary to cure the world of such evil could not but result in the eradication of the finite as a distinct domain of being. Here is an analogy: the intensity of gamma radiation that it would take to cure patient X of his pathology would clearly result in his death.

At the heart of this theodicy, then, is the principle that the depth to which goodness and justice manage to prevail within the domain of the created or the finite is a function of—if not just extensionally one with—the depth to which the power of God's Holiness or Radiance is manifested within Creation. Hence, since there must be some *concealment* of this Radiance—some *Hester Panim* or *Tzimzum*—to ensure the existence and perdurance of the finite, goodness and justice do not always prevail.<sup>21</sup> Alternatively, because nothing short of Divine *Tzimzum* could begin to guarantee the survival intact of the domain of created being, God's providential governance of the cosmos cannot fully ensure against unmerited suffering; i.e. against the sort of suffering starkly dramatized by the Book of Job. Accordingly,

... the root of evil ultimately lies in the very nature of Creation itself...because of its nature as Creation—i.e., as other than Godhead— an element of imbalance, defectiveness and darkness must enter into every restricted existence... the rigorous theistic [nonpewitheistic] tendency of Lurianic Kabbalah... requires evil as a factor necessarily inherent in Creation per se, without which Creation would instantly lose its separate existence and return to being absorbed in the Infinite.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, our theodicy can be encapsulated as follows: since finite persons (along with finite being in general)— solely by virtue of their fini-



tude—are constitutionally unable to withstand anything close to a full-scale revelation of God's Infinite Radiance, Divine Creation requires Divine *Tzimzum* (or *Hester Panim*), i.e., some serious concealment of that Radiance. This, in turn, provides "metaphysical room" (as it were) for unmerited suffering. Accordingly, it seems clear that God has the requisite morally sufficient reason for permitting such suffering so long as He has a morally sufficient reason for undertaking *Tzimzum*. It is, however, indisputable—given the (intuitively secure) assumption that finite persons who can come to know God, love God, and center their lives in God constitutes an enormous or surpassing good—that God *does* have a morally sufficient reason for undertaking *Tzimzum*: namely, the domain of created or finite being could not otherwise perdure. Hence, it seems to follow undeniably that God would have a morally sufficient reason for permitting the unmerited suffering that at times befalls human persons by virtue of the *Tzimzum* which is required for them to exist and perdure as such.

## VII

Does this theodicy have much to recommend it? I want to argue that the answer to this question is Yes. First off, it has no shortage of explanatory virtue: it accounts quite naturally for unmerited suffering in the sense that the occurrence of such suffering is not at all *surprising* if Divine *Tzimzum* is indeed a necessary condition for the existence and perdurance of the finite. Of arguably even greater significance, however, is that the theodicy under discussion copes remarkably well with the problem that goes to the very core of traditional theism's attempt to deal with the world's evil; i.e., what might suitably be called the "Manicheanism-vs.-Divine sovereignty" problem concerning the ultimate *source* of evil. Intriguingly, it is the first issue taken up by Kant in his discussion of the problem of evil in his Lectures on *Philosophical Theology*. Here is his admirably eloquent elaboration of it:<sup>23</sup>

Where does the evil in the world come from if the sole original source of everything is holy? This objection gains its strength primarily through the consideration that nothing can arise without its first predisposition having been made by its creator. What, then?... Because they were unable to make sense of this, it occurred to men long ago to assume a special evil original being, who had wrested a part of all things from the holy original source and impressed its own essence on that part. But this manicheanism conflicts with human reason... What, then? Shall we derive evil from a holy God?

Clearly, traditional theism could not begin to countenance any account of the ultimate source of evil (of whatever variety) that smacks of Manicheanism: any account which involved or made reference to an ultimate (uncreated) malevolent force with sufficient power to test, challenge, or foil the sovereignty of God. Hence, the pressing and vexed question: how did evil ever find its way into a cosmos with the finite per-

fection of being the directly willed product of a metaphysically and axiologically flawless Being Who is also the absolute or unrivalled *sovereign* of that cosmos?<sup>24</sup> Unless God's absolute sovereignty is to be sacrificed, there would seem to be something less than fully acceptable or tenable about the prevalent view that, while God undoubtedly permits the occurrence of evil (for, presumably, a morally sufficient reason), there can be no proper sense in which He constitutes its *source* (or *cause*).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, there is no shortage of passages in Scripture which call this view into question; e.g. "Shall evil befall a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6); "Out of the Most High proceedeth not Evil and good?" (Lamentations 3:38); "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the LORD, that doeth all these things." (Isaiah 45:7).

This is not in any way to suggest, let it be clear, that God must be taken to *ordain* the existence of evil, i.e., that He produces evil in just the direct or intentional manner in which He produces the natural universe. Indeed, if—as has been maintained by every theistic metaphysician with whose thought I am familiar—the inherent nature of evil consists in *privatio boni*, then, insofar as nothing ordained or intentionally produced by God can constitute privations of being or value—"... He only produces being, and all being is a good"<sup>26</sup>—evil cannot be directly willed by God. However, God does not have to *intend* the existence of evil in order for Manicheism to be false. Rather, God can still be the ultimate source of evil in a purely *extensional* sense of "source," and it is hard not to see this as a serious virtue of the theodicy which has been elaborated. Specifically, the theodicy in question allows us to comfortably maintain that there is a perfectly proper sense in which God is the ultimate source of evil, though His causation of it is clearly (indirect or) unintentional. Rather, evil can properly be regarded as an unintended by-product of the Divine *Hester Panim* or *Tzimzum* which is requisite to ensure that the domain of finite being which God has created and sustains is not annihilated, consumed, or nullified by (what would otherwise be) the intensity of a full-blown revelation of His limitless Spiritual Radiance.

Hence, the theodicy in question would seem to have the remarkable virtue of accounting for the world's evil in a manner which is scrupulously non-Manichean without in any way embracing the intuitively unsavory (if not conceptually untenable) view that a maximally or infinitely Holy Being ordains or intends the existence of evil or undeserved suffering. I know of no theodicy presently on the books that has dealt (or is able to deal) in a more metaphysically satisfying way with the "Manicheism-vs. -Divine Sovereignty" problem concerning the ultimate provenance of evil. Accordingly, when this virtue of the theodicy under discussion is coupled with its considerable explanatory power vis-a-vis the existence of unmerited suffering, it is hard to resist the conclusion that the doctrine of *Tzimzum*—properly interpreted, of course—has much to recommend it as the nucleus of an eminently respectable theodicy.

### VIII

By way of postscript, I want to deal briefly with an ostensible conundrum for our theodicy which may appear to undermine or mitigate the

case for its plausibility. Consider: central to Judaism (as well, of course, as to Christianity) is the doctrine that there is eventually destined to occur on the world's stage a messianic consummation of history. The presumably outstanding feature of this long-anticipated time or era is that there will be an unambiguous triumph of good over evil: *that evil will be defeated*.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, evil would then constitute—along with dinosaurs and the Ice Age, etc.—a “thing of the past.” The putative dilemma, however, is this: how could evil ever be defeated, if, as would seem to be implied by the theodicy which has been elaborated and defended, it “comes with the territory;” i.e., if, to cite once again the words of Gershom Scholem, “the root of evil ... lies in the very nature of Creation itself...”? Alternatively, how could evil ever be defeated if, by virtue of the Divine *Tzimzum* or *Hester Panim* that is necessary to prevent the annihilation or nullification of the finite by God's Infinite Radiance, it constitutes an inherent or *structural defect* of the finite?

First off, it would be well to note that the doctrine of the Messiah would seem to be one of those tenets of Judeo-Christian belief which are not readily amenable to rational vindication. Nonetheless, I think that we can get enough of a conceptual grip on the question to provide the bare bones of a promising argument for concluding that the view that evil will eventually be defeated can properly be regarded as consistent with the theodicy under discussion. Consider: A long-standing tenet of the Jewish (and also, I believe, of the Christian) faith is that, through the performance of Godly or holy actions (kindness, charity, mercy, etc.)—actions which instantiate the concept of *Imitatio Dei*—more of God's Radiance or Holiness is brought into the world: perhaps more perspicuously, God's Radiance or Holiness is made *more manifest* in the world. Hence, the degree to which God's Light becomes manifest in the world turns out to depend in no small way upon the actions of human persons. (This should not be taken to imply, incidentally, that Godly behavior by humans can long be sustained or deepened independently of some Divine assistance or Grace.) Note, however, that any increase in the degree to which God's Radiance is manifested or revealed within Creation necessarily involves (indeed, is tantamount to) a lessening of *Hester Panim* or *Tzimzum*; i.e., a diminishment in God's concealment of His Infinite Radiance. Accordingly, each bit of Godly behavior that we perform, by virtue of allowing more and more of God's Light or Radiance into the world—and thus reducing the level of Divine *Tzimzum*—serves to raise (in what may well be a painfully slow or incremental manner) our *tolerance* threshold for God's Radiance. (Consider this analogy: Susan needs to take a certain powerful medication in rather large doses if she is to have a complete recovery from her illness. At first, she was able to tolerate only very small doses. However, by increasing her dosage just a little at a time, she is now able to tolerate the very high doses that she needs.) However, any lessening of *Tzimzum*—any increase in the extent to which God's Light or Radiance is manifested or revealed in Creation—can only serve to bind us more closely to the *Source* of that Holiness. Which, in turn, can plausibly be expected to reinforce and thus promote Godly behavior; but that, of course, means a further lessening of *Tzimzum*—which, in turn, pro-

motes yet more Godly behavior, and so on... Accordingly, this cycle of mutual reinforcement between Godly behavior and the diminishing of *Tzimzum* strongly suggests that there is nothing conceptually disordered about the notion that mankind will finally achieve a sufficient level of spiritual maturity or stength (though the twentieth-century, of course, has hardly been encouraging in this regard) not to be obliterated by a revelation of the degree of Divine Radiance that it takes to defeat evil. Hence, our theodicy should not be taken to entail that evil constitutes an *absolutely ineradicable* structural defect of our world; i.e., to entail that evil is *logically* undefeatable. Accordingly, the long-standing Judeo-Christian tenet that evil will ultimately be defeated in a messianic consumption of history fails to constitute a conceptual obstacle to the plausibility of our theodicy.<sup>28</sup>

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## NOTES

1. "Evil" will be construed throughout as a shorthand reference to suffering that is presumably (if not patently) unmerited or ill-distributed. It seems clear that the venerable *locus classicus* for the problem raised by such suffering is found in Scripture—i.e., the Book of Job. I shall not, in what follows, have much to say about what is standardly called *moral* evil. However, I am confident that the central elements of the theodicy to be elaborated and defended in the sequel can (without much strain) be adapted to suffering brought about by human voluntariety.

2. Cf. the discussion by Rabbi Jacob Schochet entitled "Mystical Concepts in Chassidism" in his Introduction to Part IV of *Likutei Amarim-Tanya*, by Rabbi Schneur Zalman (Revised Edition, Brooklyn: Kehot Publication society, 1984), pp.888-891.

3. It should be clear that nothing on the order of a three- dimensional expanse—i.e., physical space—is connoted by "metaphysical room." Indeed, canonical theism views space (along with time) as *itself* divine creation. It seems evident that the influential medieval Jewish philosopher and theologian Saadia Gaon speaks for the tradition when he says of God: "...He is Himself the creator of all space." Cf. *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. by Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale university Press, 1948, 1972).

4. I have addressed this concern in some detail in my papers "God and Cosmos: Can the 'Mystery of Mysteries' be Solved?," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1996 (July), pp. 315-323, and "Can Traditional Theists Justifiably Reject Pantheism?," *The Monist*, 1997 (April), pp. 251-265.

5. In the words of the distinguished sage known as the Mezricher Magid: "God is called the endless one.. He fills every place.. both spiritual and physical.. there is no place empty of Him." (Cf. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, *The Light Beyond* (New York: Maznaim Publishing Corp., 1981), p. 37. This virtually echoes, of course, what Aquinas has to say in *Summa Theologica*, V.1, Q.8, Art. 4: "...to be everywhere primarily and essentially belongs to God.. whatever number of places be supposed to exist, God must be in all of them..."

6. I gratefully borrow this example from Robert Merrihew Adams' essay "The Problem of Total Devotion," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment*, ed. by Audi and Wainwright (Ithaca: Cornell University

Press, 1986), p. 187.

7. Cf. *Ethics*, I, Proposition XV, *proof*.

8. Cf. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), pp. 260-264 and Aryeh Kaplan, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-94.

9. *Ibid.* (Kaplan), pp. 84-85.

10. Cf. Alfred J. Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case Against Secondary Causation in Nature," in *Divine and Human Action*, ed. by Thomas Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 74-118 for an exceedingly helpful exposition and assessment of (the varieties of) occasionalist metaphysics. As made clear on page 83, the occasionalist denial of "secondary causation" refers strictly to *event*-causation (in contradistinction to *agent*-causation). Accordingly, it was never intended to imply that there is no such thing as human free will.

11. As William Alston puts it, "the classical doctrine maintains not that God has all the power there is, but rather that God has *unlimited* power, power to do anything He wills to do." (*Divine Nature and Human Language*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989, p. 131; Alston's emphasis.)

12. The thesis that nothing really exists except God can be seen to have an important semantic element—one which seems to soften considerably (if, indeed, not neutralize) many cases of disagreement between "pantheists" and traditional theists. (Hence, it seems to me that this element of the dispute deserves much more attention than has normally come its way.) That is, this time-honored dispute seems often to rest upon differing construals of what it means to *exist*. Consider: "...being is that which has independence, whose existence does not depend on something else. And nonbeing, or nothing, is that which is the very opposite." (Adin steinsaltz, *The Sustaining Utterance*, Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1989, p. 40.) If one subscribes to this "conservative"—or austere—view of what it means (or takes) to exist, it seems clear that one does not commit to Spinozism in holding that only God "has being." This is not to imply, of course, that varying construals of "existing" or "having being" are all equally legitimate; i.e., there may well be plausible objections to the idea that dependent objects do not "really exist."

13. While there may be many who are uncomfortable with the view that existence admits of degrees—a view that is clearly inconsistent with (but not, of course, the formal contradiction of)—the "conservative" view of existence discussed in the previous footnote, it is a doctrine which occupies an honorable place within traditional theistic metaphysics. See my "Ex Deus: A Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 29 (1992), esp. p. 166 and footnotes #9 and #10.

14. This point is nicely made by Peter van Inwagen in his *A God, Knowledge and Mystery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 158.

15. Cf. Nissan Mindel, *The Philosophy of Chabad*, Vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Kehot Publication society, 1973), pp. 78-79.

16. "...in the way, for example, that a spark is totally consumed and nullified in the flame itself, or the way the light of a candle would be totally absorbed and nullified in the very intense light of the sun" (Rabbi Jacob schochet, *op. cit.*, p. 891). see also Adin steinsaltz, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

17. *The Chumash*, the Stone Edition, with commentary S anthologized from the Rabbinic writings, by Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1993), p. 965, #33. (Bracketed material inserted by the editor.)

18. Aryeh Kaplan, *If You Where God* (New York: NCSY Orthodox Union, 1983), p.13.

19. Rabbi Jacob Schochet, *loc. cit.* (Rabbi Schochet's italics).

20. Adin steinsaltz, *The Long Shorter Way* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson,

Inc., 1988), p. 327.

21. As somewhat audaciously put by Moshe Chaim Luzzato in *The Knowing Heart* (New York: Feldheim Publishers Ltd., 1982), p. 165, "Evil, then, is found to consist in the Blessed One's withdrawing Himself from the direct governance of the universe, conducting it from afar, in the intensity of the darkness of His concealment..."

22. Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead* (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), p. 83.

23. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Philosophical Theology*, trans. by Allen W. Wood and Gertrude M. Clark (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 115).

24. John Hick seems to regard this as the basic flaw in what he calls the "Augustinian theodicy." Cf. his *Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1983), pp. 42-45.

25. Much of Hick's argument in the revised edition of *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) is devoted to securing this point. Unfortunately, or so it seems to me, Hick—inspired by Schelermacher's "Irenaean"-style theodicy—defends the position that there is really no serious alternative to maintaining that God ultimately *ordains* (or *wills*) the existence of evil and suffering (p. 228 ff.)—albeit, presumably, for a good reason: namely the building and perfecting of souls. As I go on to argue, this is not the only non-Manichean alternative open to traditional theists who are anxious to give all due glory to the Divine sovereignty. While the latter seems to demand some proper sense in which God must constitute the ultimate Source of evil, this should not be taken to require (*pace* Hick) that God *ordains* the existence of evil.

26. Cf. Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, III, 10.

27. As formulated by Luzzato, *op. cit.*, p. 167: "And ultimately He will cause His countenance to shine with a great light, He will remove negation from nature, and His creatures will remain perfect and eternal."

28. I am grateful to Larry Davis and Eleonore Stump for very helpful discussion. Indeed, Professor Stump's excellent suggestions led to what I take to be a number of important improvements in the final version of this paper.